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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4677
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0874
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0065
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0062

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 000396

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ECPS](#) [ITU](#) [FR](#) [MF](#) [CN](#)

SUBJECT: Comoros Protests French Country Code Change In Mayotte

¶1. (U) Comoran Ambassador to Paris Soulaïmana Mohamed Ahmed will reportedly travel to Geneva as soon as possible to submit an official protest to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) after France unilaterally changed the telephone country code for its territory Mayotte from 269 (like the rest of the Comoran archipelago) to 262 (like the other French holding in the region, Reunion). President Sambi publicly protested the country code change, calling it a violation of international law and an insult to Comorans, who still claim Mayotte.

¶2. (SBU) The Union of the Comoros maintains a claim on Mayotte despite the fact that France has administered the territory since independence in 1975. They claim that the plebiscite for or against independence was intended to be all-or-nothing and, when only Mayotte voted against, the French changed the terms to make it island-by-island. In any case, the Comoran flag includes four colored stripes, one for each of the four islands with Mayotte's "temporarily" white to signify it is not yet in the independent Union. While in practical terms the Comoros cannot enforce its claim on Mayotte, political leaders and public opinion are unanimous in their distrust of France and the symbolic importance of retaining their claim on Mayotte.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Hundreds of Comorans illegally immigrate to Mayotte every year seeking economic opportunities and better health care; dozens die in the attempt to cross the sea. While the Comoros' moribund economy is among the poorest in the world, heavily subsidized Mayotte is like a lower-middle class French suburb. That the Union of the Comoros and Mayotte have followed such divergent paths in the last 30 years is painfully obvious to Comorans. Many common Comorans secretly curse their ancestors for voting for independence, wondering how much better off they might be had they remained a French territory like Mayotte. The country code issue, while mundane and perhaps technically appropriate to the French, raises all of these deep-seated feelings for the Comorans. END COMMENT.

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